Ben Bagdikian on Land Reform in Mississippi, P. 3

A Cry It Would Be Best Not To Ignore

"What are they saying? Guys were saying I'd rather die here than get it in Vietnam. They feel they have more to gain by dying here."

—David Hardy, a Negro reporter for the Plainfield, N.J., Courier-News, interviewed—on emerging from the riot area of that city—by Mike Pappas, CBS News, AM, July 17.

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Second Secession and Second Civil War?

"It is as if a flight of bombers had passed over Detroit," said a TV reporter on the CBS 11 p.m. news last night, describing the smoke and flame that billowed up from no less than seven different areas of our No. 1 industrial center. If I were religious in any conventional sense, I would see the hand of God in the spreading devastation of our cities, exacting retribution for the mindless cruelty with which our bombers day after day have been setting the cities and villages of Vietnam ablaze. Suddenly the guerrilla warfare we have tried to suppress by mass destruction abroad has made its appearance at home; the asphalt jungle of metaphor has taken on a new dimension of reality; guerrilla snipers appear on the rooftops who are as elusive as their counterparts in the underbrush of Southeast Asia. It is to Ft. Bragg, home of the Green Berets, and the "Screaming Eagles" of the 101st Airborne that the President turned at midnight when Detroit asked for Federal troops. The Special Forces we have trained in the belief that they could provide a military solution to the revolt abroad of what Gunnar Myrdal has called the "under-class" now have work to do at home. The tanks of colonial war appear in *our* streets and the helicopters in *our* skies. We reap the whirlwind; the bitter taste in our mouth is the taste of our own sins. The bill for racial humiliation has come due.

Not Marx But Merchandising

In the ghettoes and the *barrios* the striking change is that where the people once feared the cops, the cops now fear the people. The mob has clashed with the man in uniform and discovered his impotence. The looters carry off their booty under his very eyes. "We arrest ten guys," said one weary police sergeant in Detroit, "and while we are taking them to jail, 100 others join in the rioting." The sheer power of numbers makes itself felt. This is the real breakdown of law and order, the appearance of anarchy, the eruption of a human volcano. What is thrown up from below is very different from what any radical or intellectual imagined. "We are now dealing," Congressman Conyers told a TV interviewer last night, "with a part of the population we have known only in statistics. They do not relate to us." This, from the ablest and most radical Negro representative in Congress, was quite a confession. No abstract issue, not even the war on which Conyers has tried to rouse them, brought these mobs into the streets. The carnival atmosphere which so appalled observers in Newark and Detroit and East Harlem was not the reflection of any ideology, racist or political. This was a mob joyful with the chance to loot, as exuberant and mindless as any mob in an Asian or African bazaar, at one moment friendly and the next bloodthirsty. The agitation which had mobilized them was the steady indoctrination of advertisement in the good things of life just beyond their reach. The commercials had a lot more to do with this than Stokeley Carmichael. Not Marx but merchandising bears fruit in this insurrection.

Black Militants on White Payrolls

The Newark Black Power conference, like any other gathering of ideologists, was an attempt to ride and rationalize the whirlwind. But there was a big gap between even the most far-out Black Nationalist raising the ante of demagoguery in Newark's finest air-conditioned hotel and the mob in those shattered streets into which so few of these self-appointed spokesmen—many of them on white payrolls—ventured. The revolt is not simply racist. In Detroit whites joined blacks in looting. Nor was it simply a class phenomena; many well-to-do people in good cars turned up to "shop." At the Newark conference any "soul brother" from the most reactionary press was welcome while white reporters who have tried sympathetically to interpret the Negro's struggle were barred or beaten. But in the streets the pattern was not purely racist. "Look at him," one Negro cried out to a newsman in Detroit, pointing derisively at the portly Negro Congressman Diggs. "He ain't never been hungry." Even Conyers, a very different breed from Diggs, only got rocks in return when in his effort to make peace he tried to tell the crowd, "We're with you." These are people who, in a real sense, had never heard of politics, conventional or radical. The human depths had been churned up, not just within society but within each participating individual.

This, in the seventh of our successive hot summers, is the black spiral cloud of an oncoming tornado that is beginning to tear our country apart. Two years after Watts there is still no sign that the country is awake to the proportions of the challenge. After Watts even an investigating committee headed by a man as far to the right as John McCone said a social revolution was necessary to avoid the explosion brewing. But on Capitol Hill one can hear the same comforting self-delusions that have blinded other societies and ruling strata

(Continued on Page Four)

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A Damning Documentary Gathered From Conventional Press Sources

Widening Gap Between What Our Leaders Say and The Truth About the War

"Gen. Westmoreland at a White House press conference spoke of 'tremendous progress' in military operations. He labelled reports that the war is a stalemate as 'completely unrealistic.' President Johnson commented: 'We are generally pleased with the progress we have made militarily.' . . . But in Saigon one could have heard recently another exchange between a reporter and a top U.S. official who in the past has been regularly hopeful on the war.

"Reporter: How would you sum up the outlook for ending the war?

"Official: Well, it's bleak. Very bleak.

"Reporter: Wasn't this the time we were looking for a breakthrough?

"Official: Yes, but there's no sign of it coming.

"Reporter: Do you think our Generals have underestimated the determination of the North Vietnamese?

"Official: Haven't they always?"

—*John Dillin (Saigon):* Christian Science Monitor, *July 17.*

* * *

"He (McNamara) pointed to . . . a 'very substantial improvement' in the economy, which is no longer in danger of being overrun by inflation."

—*At White House briefing,* Washington Post, *July 13.*

"Saigon, July 13 (AP)—Rising food prices have given the South Vietnamese economy 'quite a jolt' in the last two weeks, an economic source said today. Some prices have gone up almost 30 percent while overall prices are up 5 percent."

—*Same paper, next day.*

* * *

"Mr. McNamara found 'most dramatic progress' also in the opening of ever larger sections of major roads for both military and civilian traffic."

—*Max Frankel at the White House,* N.Y. Times, *July 13.*

"The actual situation, according to other American military and civilian officials is less hopeful . . . 1st, the classifications ["secure", "marginal" and "closed"] are highly subjective . . . Sometimes the assessments are contradicted. A 20-mile stretch of Highway 1 northwest of Danang, for example, is labelled 'secure' but July 3 a Vietnamese army convoy was smashed in a Vietcong ambush there; 20 trucks were destroyed and 14 others damaged. Second, the military figures apply only to military travel, in which weapons are always carried . . . American civilian officials are discouraged from travelling anywhere outside Saigon by road, except to Bienhoa, just north of the capital and the site of an American base. Third, the military flatly refuses to classify any road in the country as safe at night—not even the 4-lane, 15-mile expressway that links Saigon with Bienhoa . . . In most of the country . . . traffic disappears from the roads about 6 p.m. Fourth, the military statistics cover only . . . a fraction of the national total . . . Excluded are other important arteries . . . The highways omitted from the tabulations are for the most part impassible to all military traffic."

—*R. W. Apple, Jr., from Saigon, same paper, same day.*

* * *

"During two days of field trips, Mr. McNamara was given reports ranging from optimistic to glowing by U.S. field and Corps Commanders."

—*Associated Press from Saigon in* New York Times, *July 11.*

"The majority of American troops in Vietnam are now fighting Viet Cong guerrillas rather than major Communist units . . . American commanders are finding . . . that the Vietnamese seem happy to leave the work to the Americans. U.S. infantry companies spent 3 arduous days and nights searching out a VC force in a Delta district. The district chief then asked that a U.S. company be sent south to set up ambush positions against another VC force. An American adviser asked the district chief, 'What about your own two Popular Force companies, who have been sitting around here doing nothing for two weeks?' The district chief replied, 'They are tired. Let the Americans do it.' . . . Of the 25 American ground units of regimental or brigade size now deployed in Vietnam, 14 are committed to the guerrilla war . . . they seldom engage in headline-making battles. These American 'pacification' units are suffering a steady toll of casualties. A brigade of the US Army's 9th Division operating in the northern Mekong Delta has had 150 men killed and 1,000 others wounded since February . . . At least half the population is under Communist control, yielding taxes and young men to the cause."

—*AP from Saigon in* Baltimore Sun, *July 22.*

* * *

"South Vietnamese Chief of State Nguyen Van Thieu today ruled out a general mobilization of South Vietnamese because of equipment and training problems. He said that what was needed was more American troops.

—Washington Post, *July 13.*

"Saigon (Chicago Daily News Service)—South Vietnam's monthly draft calls are now lower than the number of U.S. casualties per month in Vietnam. Over the last six months the U.S. has poured almost twice as many additional troops into this war as South Vietnam has drafted or enlisted . . .

"Whenever the subject comes up, U.S. officials rush in with explanations that Vietnam is desperately short of manpower . . . 'They've hit the bottom of the manpower barrel' has become a cliche . . . But in Saigon and in any of the larger cities there are more young men visible in ponited-toe shoes and hippie haircuts than in combat boots and fatigues. There are battalions — literally battalions — of able-bodied pimps, black market money changers, pornography peddlers and motor scooter cowboys roaming the streets."

—*Raymond R. Coffey in* New York Post, *July 15.*

When You Can't Trust Your Main Ally

"The suggestion (by McNamara) that Vietnamese nationals be used in such jobs as transport and ship unloading (to release Americans for combat) also was questioned. 'The black market is full of U.S. goods now,' one source said. 'All we need is for 81-mm mortar ammunition to get fed into the system as well."

—*AP from Saigon in* Baltimore Sun, *July 17.*

And what's the "tremendous progress" in the coming elections, Secretary McNamara, when under pressure from the military, the Constituent Assembly was forced to veto a peace candidate and approve the Thieu-Ky ticket?

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A Noted Saturday Evening Post Writer Takes Up A Proposal In Our Last Issue

A Forgotten New Deal Experiment in Land Reform in Mississippi

By Ben H. Bagdikian

The Diaspora of the rural American, especially the Southern Negro, to the cities is considered an unalterable tide that, despite the catastrophe of ghetto living, is a necessary step in our social evolution.

It isn't. Most farm people now in the ghetto prefer the country if they don't have to starve. If public money spent in the city to overcome the traumas of the ghetto—welfare, law enforcement and criminal procedures, etc.—were spent on the family while still in its native rural land the result would be a sounder society.

Good Results Visible 30 Years Later

Though it isn't a tactful term to use, land reform is needed in American rural areas, especially in places like the Mississippi Delta. What most Americans have forgotten is that such reform was once practiced in its classical non-violent form only 30 years ago and with visibly good results a generation later.

In rural Mississippi the sight of the unpainted leaning shack subconsciously brings to mind, "Negro" and of the painted clapboard farmhouse with awnings, "white". This is almost completely accurate—except in an area of Holmes County which has the best organized Negro rural community in the state. Its backbone is over 100 independent, land-owning Negro farm families who are the nucleus not only for civil rights and educational reform but of economic development. Their families for the most part are solid, their children well educated, their homes hopeful places for the young to grow in. Their outlook is as secure and full as a Negro can expect in the state of Mississippi. The cost to government? An average of $6,200 per farm, long since paid off.

In 1944, former Rep. Harold Cooley, not a wild Populist, studied the effect of such programs. He reported that in 1940 the Farm Security Administration, predecessor to Farmers Home Administration, bought up 9,350 acres of land in Mileston, Mississippi (Holmes County), divided it into 106 farms, 70 of them transferred to individuals and 36 to co-operatives, all for formerly landless tenant farmers. The land and farm equipment was paid for by a 40-year 3 per cent loan. Cooley's conclusion 2½ years later was, "As an example of the progress that families on this project are making, it will be noted that principal repayments exceed the amount due." Today, 23 years after that report, these former sharecroppers and their sons are independent, productive farmers who form the heart of the most vigorous rural community in their state.

The Holmes County project was only one of many started by the New Deal. It began in 1935 with the Resettlement Administration which, under executive order from Franklin Roosevelt, bought up large plantations and parcels that were on the market or defaulting on taxes, and redistributed them. Ten thousand families were resettled in 152 projects, some with help to build community facilities. In 1937 Resettlement became Farm Security, and in 1946, FHA.

More important than the change in name is the dreary history of these projects. First, conservatives forced the government to stop buying and redistributing the land directly. Instead, the poor farmer had to buy the land himself—in something less than an equal bargaining position with local landlords. Second, direct government loans were replaced by government guarantees of private loans. In the Deep South this meant that the Negro, unrepresented on local agricultural committees that control FHA loan guarantees, seldom was approved. If here and there the Negro received a grant he then had to arrange loans from white banks, the same political forces that fought his civil rights and were in no mood to help him gain economic independence.

The G.O.P. Ended It

World War II damped down New Deal land reform. After the war, Republican congressional control kept the program at an almost meaningless level of $15,000,000 (the need had been calculated at a minimum of $500,000,000). The Eisenhower years spread anaesthesia over rural as well as urban areas. In 1961 FHA loans began to climb again and in fiscal 1966 reached $233,000,000.

But this still does not reach significant numbers of Southern Negroes. They cannot penetrate white supremacist state governments and more effective measures are killed by the Southern-cum-big-agricultural bloc. When the Economic Opportunity Act was originally framed it included a fund for non-profit corporations that could buy arable land on the open market and sell it on favorable terms to formerly landless tenant farmers, at less than market price, if necessary. It was one of the first items knocked out of the bill by the anti-poverty-program Southern bloc.

Even programs to help rural white Appalachia suffered the same fate. A month before his death, President Kennedy directed FHA to grant special loans to make the worst rural homes of eastern Kentucky weather-proof and safe. More than 10,000 applications were received, 2,700 approved (average cost, $852 each), but a year later the program was terminated with 6,000 valid applications and unfilled.

The cost of creating a small viable family farm for presently landless tenants is about $18,000 each, with the cost in the Deep South closer to $10,000. This would be with 40-year loans at low interest. Welfare payments in the ghetto are outright grants whose usual dividend is dependency, frustration, degrading game-playing with the authorities, and in a few years they consume more public money than the cost of keeping the same family in its original environment but in a new home with a brighter future. The $500,000,000 cost years ago was considered visionary. Most big city mayors would weep in gratitude if they could solve their ghetto problems for $5 billion.

The odds of such land reform are small. Agricultural programs benefit large operators, not small. Agricultural economists concentrate on efficiency with size. But they usually ignore gains in social policy that come from providing a satisfactory life for the desperate farm worker forced against his better judgment into the ghetto, and from the overall benefit of diluting the growing oligopoly of big agricultural operators who are not very far from direct control of agricultural policy and consumer economics.

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The Next Step Could Be From Race Riot to Race War

(Continued from Page One)

on the eve of upheavals. To listen to the House debate over the anti-riot bill was to believe that Stokeley Carmichael was a Black Batman who need only be shot down to end the trouble; it is as if unconsciously the House was seeing the crisis in terms of TV and newspaper comic strips about wicked Supermen. To hear the insipid and inhuman jokes next day in the debate which defeated the rat-control bill was to see again how shallow was the reservoir of sympathy and understanding on which we can draw. It was appalling to hear young Herman Talmadge of Georgia, by no means a benighted race-baiter, tell the Senate yesterday, "Lest there be any misunderstanding, however, I do submit that I do know where blame *should not* [his emphasis] be blamed. And that is, on poverty, poor housing or unemployment." This is the classic voice of social bankruptcy, the authentic and familiar blindness.

The Negro's Strategic Power

It is time fully to recognize the Negro's powerful position. The core of the cities have become Negro and the destruction in the cities hits at those urban property values on which so much of our basic financial institutions rest, particularly the insurance companies and mutual savings banks. The city is the inner nerve ganglion of our society. The Negro can destroy it. A handful of snipers can do in the ghetto what a handful of guerrillas can do in the countryside. The anger that might turn against the militant few as the pitiful belongings of the poor themselves go up in arson turns instead against the occupying power when incoming police or troops, in their search for that hard-to-get handful, kill the innocent and mobilize the whole community behind the guerrillas. This is what happened in Newark and Plainfield and it is this polarization which most needs *to be understood and avoided if order is to be restored.* The best results, it is already clear, are obtained when police restraint and troop withdrawal make it possible for the saner elements of the community in revolt to take over the task of calming the mob.

A race is on, and the outcome will determine the future of our beloved country. On the one side are the forces of reason and compassion, prepared to understand the agony of the Negro and the other "colored" components of our white-dominated society. On the other side are the forces of fear and hate which have been building up in the white community, so far expressed only privately. This can easily turn orgies of ghetto self-destruction and looting into real race war between white and black. The unwillingness of Congress to enact gun control is of terrible significance. As the social fabric frays, more and more households are stocking arms, like suspicious nations in the tense wider world. "We gonna burn America down," a Negro rioter cried on TV last night. It's not going to let itself be burned down. The Negro need to hate after so many years of oppression has evoked a counter-hate. The secessionist and separatist slogans of that Newark conference, where moderates were afraid to be moderate, can bring us to a second civil war.

Dick Gregory's Heretical Insight

The Newark program of partition, violence and race hatred can destroy the moderates on both sides and burn the bridges to reconciliation. We cannot fight apartheid in South Africa and advocate it in the United States. We cannot fight white racism and applaud black racism. Perhaps the wisest words spoken at Newark came from Dick Gregory after the conference was over when he said, "This is what happens in a revolution. The oppressed have assumed the personality of the oppressors." But there is no way out, except to learn to live together. The other way lies Negro suicide and mutual destruction. You need only look around at the realities of the world—Nigeria's tribal civil war, for example—to see that America's pluralism and social conscience makes the fight for its preservation in a peaceful solution a duty not only to our selves but to a world poisoned by fratricidal irrationality. For the black man, too, America offers something better than Africa. Out of this turmoil let us together build a better America, at last fulfilling the great egalitarian vision of its founders. The first, the essential step, must be to end that insane and costly war in Vietnam before it engulfs us in the final cataclysm of war with China.

9 a.m., July 25.

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